

5-1-1938

# Municipal Elections

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## Recommended Citation

Swisher, J A. "Municipal Elections." *The Palimpsest* 19 (1938), 193-199.

Available at: <https://ir.uiowa.edu/palimpsest/vol19/iss5/5>

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## Municipal Elections

Municipal government in the Black Hawk Purchase was authorized by the Wisconsin Territorial Assembly on December 6, 1836. Sometime in March, 1837, a meeting was held at the Methodist Church in Dubuque. The citizens thus assembled, having decided to incorporate as a town, designated April 1st as election day. At the appointed time Thomas S. Wilson, T. C. Fassitt, William Myers, Charles Miller, and Timothy Fanning were elected trustees of the town, and Thomas S. Wilson was chosen president of the board of trustees. Other officers elected at that time included Charles Corkery, clerk; Patrick Quigley, treasurer; Philip C. Morheiser, marshal and collector; and Ezekiel C. Dougherty, assessor. In August, 1837, Wilson resigned his office. As a result John Plumbe was named as a member of the board of trustees, and T. C. Fassitt became president of the board. With this change the official family was established for the year. Thus Dubuque was transformed from a mining camp to a municipality.

Meanwhile, Burlington, too, had incorporated according to the general plan authorized by the



Territorial legislature. The trustees of the town consisted of Amos Ladd, president, and David Rorer, George H. Beeler, Enoch Wade, and George W. Kelley forming the board of trustees. Thornton Bayless was the clerk. The first meeting of the board, it is recorded, was held at the office of David Rorer on April 29, 1837.

James W. Grimes was appointed the first solicitor of Burlington. He appeared before the board and thanked the members for the honor conferred, but admitted that he was not qualified for the position as he was less than twenty-one years of age. The trustees, recognizing his ability, however, waived the objection, and he accepted the office, notwithstanding his youth.

Early in 1838 a new system of municipal government appeared in the Iowa country when, on January 19th, special charters were granted to the towns of Burlington and Fort Madison. Each of these charters provided for an annual election of officers by the qualified voters, though the time and manner of holding elections varied somewhat. The Burlington charter provided that "for the preservation of peace and good order, and the promoting of the prosperity and quiet" of the town "the free white citizens" twenty-one years of age, should on the first Monday in February of each year, elect "a mayor and eight



aldermen, a recorder, treasurer, and engineer". The Fort Madison charter, following the general plan more closely, provided that, on the first Monday of May each year "the free male inhabitants" of the city should elect "a president, recorder and five trustees", any five of whom should constitute a board for the transaction of business.

Partisanship was deplored in local elections. "On Monday next," wrote the editor of the *Wisconsin Territorial Gazette* on February 3rd, "let it be remembered, the election of officers, under the charter will take place. We trust that honest, capable and faithful men may be selected for the several offices. Men, who will do their duty, whole duty, and nothing but their duty, without fear, favor or faction."

In another connection, in the same issue of his paper, Editor Clarke said: "In all questions touching the interests of our town—(pardon us, we mean city)—if we cannot agree, let us kindly agree to differ. We certainly have all the same object in view, the benefit of the town, (city,) and if we differ merely as to the best means of accomplishing one common purpose, though it may be a matter of regret, yet it is not a matter that ought to beget ill-feeling." If the election should arouse personal animosities, he observed, "it requires no prophet to foretell that the administration of our



authorities will be a stormy one, and it may be rendered a useless one; but if we go to the polls and honestly exercise our best judgments, vote in good temper for the best men, and finally submit to and support the decision of the majority, much real good may be expected."

The Burlington election was held at the Wisconsin Hotel on Monday, February 5th. George H. Beeler who had served as a trustee, was elected mayor. Amos Ladd, the former president, and George Temple, James McKell, David Hendershott, William B. Remey, John B. Newhall, Joseph L. Kimball, and Jeremiah Lamson were elected aldermen. Thornton Bayless, the former clerk, was elected recorder; Thomas Cooper, engineer; Jesse B. Webber, treasurer; and John M. Garrigus, marshal.

In accordance with the original act under which the town of Dubuque was still operating the board of trustees issued a notice that an election would be held on April 2nd for the selection of trustees for the ensuing year. The place designated for the election was "at Mr. James Fanning's house, next door to Scott & Taylor". The polls, the notice read, "will be open at 9 o'clock, A. M. and close at 6 o'clock, P. M."

A few days later the *Iowa News* issued the significant statement that "the highest number of



votes" had been cast for Alex. Butterworth, John McKenzie, Benjamin Rupert, John Plumbe, and Philip C. Morhizer. Thus it appears that in Dubuque as in Burlington there was a considerable "turnover" of officials. Among the members of the first board of trustees in Dubuque, John Plumbe alone was a successful candidate in the second election. Philip C. Morhizer, however, had been advanced from the office of marshal and collector to membership on the board of trustees. Presently, it appears, he became president of the board and Edward Langworthy was added to the trustees.

The special charter of Fort Madison designated the "first Monday of May" as election day. Preparatory to this election the Fort Madison *Patriot*, on April 18th, published a proposed ticket consisting of William Paull, candidate for president, and Johnston J. Phares, Benjamin Brattain, Thos. Fitzpatrick, Peter Miller, and Isaac Johnson, candidates for trustees. At the same time James G. Edwards, editor of the *Patriot*, expressed the hope that "all our citizens may unite on such persons as will be likely to promote the present and future prosperity of this rising community".

A week later Edwards, in an editorial, called attention to the fact that the previously announced ticket had, "by request, been withdrawn". Mean-



while, two other tickets—one led by Henry Eno, and another headed by Edwards, himself— had been announced. Apparently, however, the contest was friendly, and not marred by the political strife that sometimes accompanies municipal elections.

Edwards, commenting upon the situation, said: "This will be the first election of Town Officers ever held in Fort Madison. The character of this election—the manner in which the canvass is conducted, we mean—may enstamp itself on all future elections of a similar kind. It is on this account that we have deprecated all collision of feeling—all party spirit—all dictation—in the bringing out of candidates. There are interests to be promoted, in which all should feel alike identified, and at the shrine of which ambition and every other improper feeling should be sacrificed."

Regarding his own candidacy, he explained that the nomination was made by the town meeting "without our having been apprised of it, and it is the more gratifying on this account. But gratifying as it is, we candidly confess that the gentleman whose name stands at the head of the other ticket, which was handed in for publication late last evening, has, in our opinion, decidedly the preference to priority of claim on the suffrage of our fellow-citizens. If he will stand, we shall



most cheerfully relinquish all claim in his favor and do all we can to promote the election of Henry Eno, Esq., by a unanimous vote."

Such words of commendation, coming as they did from the pen of an ardent Whig and a political opponent, must have been gratifying, indeed, to Eno. It seems probable, however, that this cordial editorial may have, in fact, attracted votes to Edwards. At all events, he was duly elected and had the honor of serving as the first president of Fort Madison. The board of trustees which accompanied him consisted of John A. Drake, Joseph Morrison, William Wilson, Lorenzo Bullard, and Charles Macdill. W. R. Crawford was elected recorder.

As evidence of good faith and a desire to conduct official business in an aggressive and efficient manner, Edwards promptly gave notice that the trustees would meet at his residence on Friday, May 11th, at four in the afternoon. "A punctual attendance is desired."

J. A. SWISHER